

December 6, 2002

Livestock and Seed Programs
Agriculture Marketing Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Stop 0249 Room 2092-S
Washington, DC 20250-0249

Re- Food irradiation in the National School Lunch Program:

USDA,

USDA has requested comment on its proposal to buy irradiated foods for its Commodity Purchase Programs, which is also inclusive of the National School Lunch Program. As a parent and grandfather, I'm very disturbed at USDA's consideration of purchasing irradiated food products for the children of this country.

I own and operate a farm in Northeast Missouri and have spent my lifetime producing meat commodities that I consider wholesome, free from antibiotics, hormones and other growth stimulants as well as harmful pathogens. Area producers around this country for years have tried to introduce our wholesome meat and food products into the local School Lunch Program, so that we as parents are assured that our children are consuming a natural, wholesome food product. But under the regulatory authority of USDA, the schools can only provide and serve product's, which meets USDA's guidelines.

I'm assured that USDA has knowledge that research shows that between 1996 and the year 2000, the U.S. Department of Agriculture purchased chicken, fowl, pork or beef from twelve companies that were found to have committed multiple violations of either environmental laws or labor laws or both. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service purchased \$484.8 million worth of food from these companies. The food purchased went toward the School Lunch Program, and other Federal nutrition programs for low income, homeless, and elderly Americans. Five of the companies that supplied food for the School Lunch Program had large recalls of their product due to suspected or known contamination.

When considering the sources of food for the federal nutrition programs, the federal government appears to disregard the misdeeds of companies with persistent pollution problems and questionable safety practices. In doing so, its outrageous that USDA would even consider buying products from companies who irradiate rather than cleaning up their misconduct while processing. Irradiation is not the answer to the growing problem of negligence among processing facilities in this country. Never before in the history of this country has so many recalls taken place in our food system . Negligence may take place at the processing facilities, but USDA should be held accountable for adhering to it, rather than taking proper procedures in stopping it.

In conclusion, every citizen in this country deserves the right to a wholesome food product that is guaranteed safe by federal standards. Irradiation is not tolerable under any circumstances, the choice of safe food can only be guaranteed by the use of safe practices through reliable sources, along with stringent inspection practices. The sole reasoning for irradiation is to only to mask the problems within. The youth and future generations of this country deserve better, than what USDA is considering doing.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Terry Spence".

Terry Spence
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